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REVIEW OF SECTORAL CLUSTERS: PROTECTION OF THE ATMOSPHERE
AND PROTECTION OF THE OCEANS AND ALL KINDS OF SEAS

Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

Protection of the atmosphere and protection
of the oceans and all kinds of seas

(Chapters 9 and 17 of Agenda 21)

A. Interlinkages

1. The Commission notes that a number of issues are common to both chapters under review - chapter 9 (Protection of the atmosphere) and chapter 17 (Protection of the oceans, all kinds of seas, including enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, and coastal areas and the protection, rational use and development of their living resources). It also notes that both these chapters have interlinkages with several other chapters of Agenda 21. Indeed, the broad-based nature of chapters 9 and 17 can be seen to encompass all important aspects of sustainable development.

2. The Commission stresses the close interrelationship between protection of oceans and all kinds of seas and protection of the atmosphere, in view of the exchange of matter and energy that takes place between the atmosphere and oceans and their influence on marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It therefore calls for the integration of protective measures in order to address effectively the problems of adverse impacts of human activity on the atmosphere and the oceans. To this end, in particular, the Commission considers that there is a need to further strengthen coordination mechanisms of cooperation between regions and subregions for better exchange of information and experience gained.



B. Protection of the atmosphere

3. The Commission welcomes, with reservations, the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on protection of the atmosphere (E/CN.17/1996/22 and Add.1). It stresses the need for broad international action to address global atmospheric problems, taking into full account principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1/ and paragraph 4.3 of chapter 4 of Agenda 21 (Changing consumption patterns) 2/ in developing measures to protect the atmosphere on a global scale. It furthermore stresses that atmospheric protection measures to reduce air pollution, combat climate change and prevent ozone layer depletion should be undertaken at the national, subregional, regional and international levels.

4. The Commission notes the risk of exacerbating other environmental, as well as socio-economic, problems through actions to address an individual issue, and stresses the need to address atmosphere-related problems in an integrated and comprehensive way. It emphasizes that an essential component of measures to protect the atmosphere, environment and human health is the reduction of local emissions - especially urban air pollution - which must be dealt with at the local, regional and international levels on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities. In addition, it stresses the importance of combating all kinds of land degradation, deforestation, forest degradation and desertification, which have adverse impacts on human health and the environment, and the importance of improved land use management. In this context the Commission refers to principle 15 3/ of the Rio Declaration and

1/ "States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures that their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command."

2/ "Poverty and environmental degradation are closely interrelated. While poverty results in certain kinds of environmental stress, the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances."

3/ "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

/...

principle 3 4/ of article 3 of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, which reflect the precautionary principle approach. The Commission recommends the application of this approach, taking into account related uncertainties and risks.

5. The Commission stresses the importance of a sound scientific and socio-economic knowledge base upon which appropriate responses to atmospheric pollution can be formulated, and encourages national participation in, and support for, international programmes of relevant scientific, technical and socio-economic research, monitoring and assessment, taking into account the precautionary principle referred to in paragraph 4 above. The Commission welcomes the Second Assessment Report (SAR) adopted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in December 1995 as the most comprehensive assessment of climate change issues to date. The report states, among other conclusions, and in the full context of the report, that the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate. 5/ The report emphasizes that the scientific and technical expertise required by the developing countries and by countries with economies in transition to protect the atmosphere needs further strengthening and, to this end, requires the financial and technical support of the international community. It supports the initiative of a number of international organizations to establish an integrated international framework for climate-related programmes.

6. The Commission urges countries that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, with special emphasis on the successful conclusion of the Berlin Mandate process; the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, its Montreal Protocol and subsequent amendments and adjustments; and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and fully implement their commitments therein.

7. The Commission encourages parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as those countries in the process of ratification, to coordinate activities with those undertaken under relevant

4/ "The Parties should take precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent or minimize the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such measures, taking into account that policies and measures to deal with climate change should be cost-effective so as to ensure global benefits at the lowest possible cost. To achieve this, such policy and measures should take into account different socio-economic contexts, be comprehensive, cover all relevant sources, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and adaptation, and comprise all economic sectors. Efforts to address climate change may be carried out cooperatively by interested Parties."

5/ This conclusion must be considered within the full context of the IPCC/SAR, and its preamble. The conclusions of the IPCC/SAR must be considered with the caveats and uncertainties contained in the report.

international agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

8. The Commission asserts that the production, conversion and use of energy has been and will continue to be one of the fundamental requirements for economic growth and social improvement. Non-sustainable development and use in the energy and other sectors is linked to environmental and societal problems, including air and water pollution, health impacts and global warming.

9. The Commission welcomes the outcome of the Marrakesh Seminar on Decentralized Electrification of Rural Areas (Morocco, 13-17 November 1995) and calls upon Governments as well as international organizations and non-governmental organizations to consider supporting, as appropriate, the recommendations of the Seminar.

10. The Commission calls on Governments to consider the broad spectrum of cost-effective policy instruments - economic and fiscal, regulatory and voluntary - available to them, including environmental cost internalization and removal of environmentally damaging subsidies, to improve energy efficiency and efficiency standards and to promote the use of sustainable and environmentally sound renewable energy sources, as well as the use of energy sources with low greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, in all relevant sectors; and encourages Governments and relevant institutions and organizations to cooperate, as appropriate, in the implementation of policy and economic instruments aimed at minimizing adverse effects on international competitiveness and at optimizing the allocation of resources, and to cooperate in minimizing the possible adverse economic impacts on developing countries resulting from the implementation of those policies and measures.

11. The Commission urges Governments and relevant institutions and organizations to utilize education and training, information dissemination, enhancement of knowledge and voluntary agreements to improve efficiency in the production, distribution and use of energy and other natural resources.

12. The Commission urges multilateral financial institutions to use their investment strategies, in cooperation with interested recipient countries, for the development and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies, provided that such considerations do not constitute new barriers and conditions to accessing financial resources.

13. With regard to international cooperation, the Commission refers to paragraph 2 of the decision on financial resources and mechanisms.

14. The Commission urges Governments and the private sector to increase their research into energy and material efficiency and more environmentally sound production technologies, including improved GHG sequestration technologies, and to actively participate in technology transfer and capacity-building in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It also urges the industrial sector to take full account of concerns related to the protection of atmosphere and the use of cost-effective environmentally sound technologies in their investment strategies.

15. The Commission notes the rapid growth in the transport sector resulting in a concomitant increase in energy requirements in both industrialized and developing countries. It urges Governments to consider appropriate options, such as the different measures mentioned in paragraph 64 of the report of the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues (E/CN.17/1996/6). The Commission notes that a Conference on Environment and Transport will be held in 1997 under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), as suggested in paragraph 9.15 (f) of chapter 9 of Agenda 21 (Protection of the atmosphere).

16. The Commission recommends that Governments and organizations actively support the Montreal Protocol and the efforts of its parties to eliminate the illegal trade in ozone-depleting substances; continue, within existing financial mechanisms, to provide adequate financial and technical support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to assist them in phasing out production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances, in accordance with their obligations under the Montreal Protocol; consider the total environmental impact of alternatives to ozone-depleting substances; and give priority to solutions that provide the greatest overall benefit in terms of both ozone protection and prevention of global warming. This will be consistent with an integrated approach to the protection of the atmosphere. The Commission expresses concern about the financial state of the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol, and calls upon States to make contributions thereto.

17. The Commission urges Governments and organizations, in considering transboundary air pollution issues, to take measures to reduce emissions of acidifying substances with the aim of not exceeding critical loads and levels and to reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds; and urges developed countries to enhance programmes that share management expertise, scientific expertise and information on technical mitigation options with developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

18. The Commission encourages Governments to address the growing problem of transboundary air pollution and, in particular, risks caused by persistent organic pollutants. The Commission notes, in particular, the pollution affecting the Arctic. In this respect the Commission reaffirms the need for effective transboundary air pollution agreements such as the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols in all affected regions. It urges Governments, as appropriate, to develop and implement policies and programmes, in a cooperative manner, to control emissions and prevent transboundary air pollution in their regions, through, inter alia, increased technology transfer and shared technical information. The Commission stresses the need for research and evaluation of endocrine disrupting chemicals.

19. The Commission requests the Secretary-General to prepare a report for consideration by the Commission at its fifth session, in 1997, covering an inventory of ongoing energy-oriented programmes and activities within the United Nations system, as well as proposals for arrangements as appropriate, that might be needed to foster the linkage between energy and sustainable development within the United Nations system.